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Mechanisms for Low-Light Therapy V

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Contents

- vii Conference Committee
- ix Introduction

SESSION 1 REVIEWS AND DOSIMETRY

- 7552 03 The importance of pulsing illumination parameters in LLLT [7552-02] D. Barolet, RoseLab Skin Optics Lab. (Canada) and McGill Univ. (Canada)
- 7552 05 **Role of the circulation in the systemic effects of low-light therapy** [7552-04] M. Dyson, King's College London (United Kingdom)

7552 06 Low level laser therapy for traumatic brain injury [7552-05]

Q. Wu, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Jinan Central Hospital, Shandong Univ. (China); Y.-Y. Huang, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Guangxi Medical Univ. (China); S. Dhital, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States) and Univ. of Tokyo (Japan); S. K. Sharma, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States); A. C.-H. Chen, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States); A. C.-H. Chen, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States); M. J. Whalen, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States); M. R. Hamblin, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), and Harvard-MIT Div. of Health Sciences and Technology (United States)

SESSION 2 IN VITRO STUDIES

- 7552 08 In-vitro suppression of metabolic activity in malignant human glioblastomas due to pulsed– low frequency electric potential exposures [7552-07]
 A. Schlichting, Marquette Univ. (United States); R. W. Waynant, D. B. Tata, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (United States)
- 7552 0A **Comparison of cellular responses induced by low level light in different cell types** [7552-09] Y.-Y. Huang, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Guangxi Medical Univ. (China); A. C.-H. Chen, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States) and Boston Univ. School of Medicine (United States); S. K. Sharma, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States) and Harvard Medical School (United States); Q. Wu, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Jinan Central Hospital, Shandong Univ. (China); M. R. Hamblin, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Jinan Central Hospital, Shandong Univ. (China); M. R. Hamblin, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Harvard-MIT Div. of Health Sciences and Technology (United States)
- 7552 0B Effect of low level laser therapy on hair cell regeneration following gentamicin induced ototoxicity in postnatal organotypic culture of rat cochlea [7552-10] C.-K. Rhee, Y. H. Kim, S. H. Kim, P. He, J. C. Ahn, Dankook Univ. College of Medicine (Korea, Republic of)

SESSION 3 ANIMAL STUDIES

- 7552 OE Low-power light and isolated rat hearts after ischemia of myocardium [7552-13] V. A. Monich, O. V. Drugova, V. F. Lazukin, A. B. Bavrina, Nizhny Novgorod State Medical Academy (Russian Federation)
- The photobiomodulation in the bone repair after radiotherapy: experimental study in rats [7552-16]
 M. R. S. Freire, Federal Univ. of Bahia (Brazil); D. Almeida, Federal Univ. of Reconcavo of Bahia (Brazil); J. N. Santos, V. A. Sarmento, Federal Univ. of Bahia (Brazil)

 7552 01 Prevention of bloodstream infections by photodynamic inactivation of multiresistant Pseudomonas aeruginosa in burn wounds [7552-17]
 M. C. E. Hashimoto, R. A. Prates, D. J. Toffoli, Instituto de Pesquisas Energéticas e Nucleares (Brazil); L. C. Courrol, Instituto de Pesquisas Energéticas e Nucleares (Brazil) and Unifesp (Brazil); M. S. Ribeiro, Instituto de Pesquisas Energéticas e Nucleares (Brazil)

SESSION 4 CLINICAL STUDIES

- 7552 0J Review of technology development and clinical trials of transcranial laser therapy for acute ischemic stroke treatment [7552-18]
 B. E. Catanzaro, CFE Services (United States); J. Streeter, Banyon Biomarkers (United States);
 L. de Taboada, PhotoThera (United States)
- 7552 0K Laser therapy for the treatment of arthritic knees: a clinical study [7552-19] F. Kahn, R. Liboro, F. Saraga, Meditech Laser Rehabilitation Ctr. (Canada)
- 7552 OL Transcranial LED therapy for cognitive dysfunction in chronic, mild traumatic brain injury: two case reports [7552-20]

M. A. Naeser, VA Boston Healthcare System (United States) and Boston Univ. School of Medicine (United States); A. Saltmarche, MedX Health Inc. (Canada); M. H. Krengel, VA Boston Healthcare System (United States) and Boston Univ. School of Medicine (United States); M. R. Hamblin, Massachusetts General Hospital (United States), Harvard Medical School (United States), and Harvard-MIT Div. of Health Sciences and Technology (United States); J. A. Knight, VA Boston Healthcare System (United States) and Boston Univ. School of Medicine (United States)

7552 0M The effects of infrared laser therapy and weightbath traction hydrotherapy as components of complex physical treatment in disorders of the lumbar spine: a controlled pilot study with follow-up [7552-21] C. Oláh, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Hospital and Univ. Teaching Hospital (Hungary); M. Oláh, Hungarospa Health Resort (Hungary); B. Demeter, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Hospital and Univ. Teaching Hospital (Hungary); Z. Jancsó, Debrecen Medical Univ.

(Hungary); V. Páll, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Hospital and Univ. Teaching Hospital (Hungary); T. Bender, Polyclinic of the Hospitaller Broterhs of St. John of God (Hungary)

7552 0N **Syntonic phototherapy** [7552-23] R. L. Gottlieb, College of Syntonic Optometry (United States)

POSTER SESSION

- Polarized light improves cutaneous healing on diabetic rats [7552-24]
 L. M. P. Ramalho, P. C. Oliveira, A. M. C. Marques, A. L. Barbosa Pinheiro, Federal Univ. of Bahia (Brazil)
- Assessment of laser photobiomodulation and polarized light on the healing of cutaneous wounds on euthyroid and hypothyroid induced rats [7552-25]
 L. M. P. Ramalho, B. M. P. Weyll, M. D. M. da Costa Lino, M. J. P. Ramalho, A. L. Barbosa Pinheiro, Univ. Federal da Bahia (Brazil)
- 7552 0Q The antinociceptive effects of Monechma ciliatum and changes in EEG waves following oral and intrathecal administration in rats [7552-28] A. B. Meraiyebu, A. B. Adelaiye, Bingham Univ. (Nigeria); O. S. O, Univ. of Jos (Nigeria)
- 7552 OR Transcranial near infrared laser therapy (NILT) to treat acute ischemic stroke: a review of efficacy, safety and possible mechanism of action derived from rabbit embolic stroke studies [7552-31]
 P. A. Lapchak, Univ. of California, San Diego (United States); J. Streeter, L. De Taboada, PhotoThera, Inc. (United States)

Author Index

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Introduction

The use of low levels of visible or near infrared light known as low level laser (light) therapy (LLLT) for preventing tissue damage and cell death, reducing pain, inflammation and edema, promoting healing of wounds, deeper tissues and nerves, has been known for almost 40 years since the invention of lasers. Originally thought to be a peculiar property of laser light (soft or cold lasers), the subject has now broadened to include photobiomodulation and photobiostimulation using non-coherent light.

Despite many reports of positive findings from experiments conducted in vitro, in animal models, and in randomized controlled clinical trials, LLLT remains controversial. This likely is due to two main reasons; firstly the biochemical and cellular mechanisms underlying the positive effects are incompletely understood, and secondly the complexity of rationally choosing amongst a large number of illumination parameters such as wavelength, fluence, power density, pulse structure, and treatment timing has led to the publication of a number of negative studies as well as many positive ones. In particular a biphasic dose response has been frequently observed where low levels of light have a much better effect than higher levels.

In 2006 SPIE Photonics West reinstated a conference series on this topic entitled "Mechanisms for Low Light Therapy" and the present volume of the Proceedings of SPIE contains the papers presented in the fifth conference of this series in 2010. These proceedings contain several studies that report on the effects of LLLT on the nervous system and in particular on the brain. Two papers from Photothera discussed the clinical trials of transcranial laser therapy for stroke (7552-18 Catanzaro and 7552-31 Lapchak), while LLLT for traumatic brain injury was covered in mice (7552-5 Wu) and in humans (7552-20, Naeser). Reduction of ototoxicty after gentamycin by LLLT was covered by 7552-10 Rhee. Other studies covered bone healing after radiation damage (7552-116 Freire) and wound healing in rats with polarized light (7552-25 Ramalho).

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